

This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + Refrain from automated querying Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

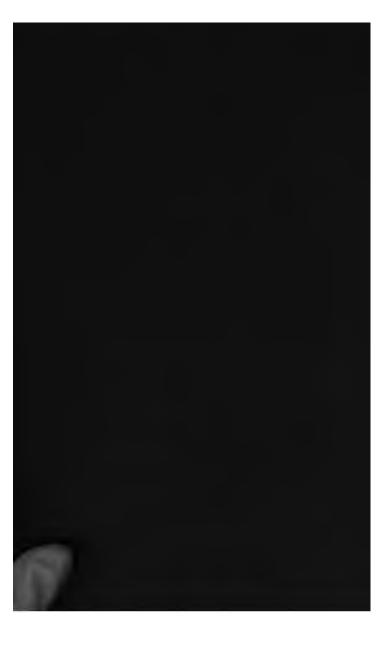
About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at http://books.google.com/

THE POETRY

SIR SAMUEL FERGUSON

HIM



THE POETRY

ΟF

SIR SAMUEL FERGUSON

BY

MR. JUSTICE O'HAGAN

DUBLIN

M. H. GILL AND SON

O'CONNELL STREET

1887

M. H. GILL AND SON, PRINTERS, DUBLIN

PREFACE.

I have endeavoured to express in these pages my sense, not only of Sir Samuel Ferguson's genius as a poet, but of his singular success in giving to Irish legends and traditions, to the manners, feelings, and distinctive features of the Irish race, due expression in the English language—the language which the vast majority of the Irish-born and Irish-descended men do now and must in the future speak. Were it not for efforts of this kind it would be almost inevitable that the intellectual tastes of Irishmen should be absorbed by the modern literature of England—a literature which, taken on the whole, I deem to be neither very elevating nor purifying in its tendency.

However this may be, it is a certain good for our country to possess a distinctive literature of its own. Much has been already done. It would be superfluous to go through a bead-roll of honoured names, to all of whom gratitude and admiration are due. But Ferguson was amongst the earliest pioneers in this path, and was a labourer in it to the last. I rejoice that his widow, Lady Ferguson (herself the author of a delightful work on early Irish history), has undertaken to republish her husband's works, verse and prose, in a cheap and accessible form.

Little more than a year ago, Sir Samuel Ferguson entrusted to me a poem never yet published. It was an address to a dear friend of his, Dr. Robert Gordon, now long dead. It is written in the style and language of Burns; a dialect as native to many Ulstermen as to the inhabitants of Ayrshire itself. Its date is 1845, when he was just thirty-five years old. On the very day before his death, I recalled it to his recollection, and he pressed my hand in token how well he remembered it. I was under the impression that he had given me full discretion as to its publication after his death; but, on reperusal of the letter by which it was accompanied, I find that he wished the

publication to be delayed till farther on in the century. However, with the full assent of Lady Ferguson, I can give three stanzas, indicating how strongly the pulse of his heart beat for Ireland and how keen was his desire to serve her:

- "Lord for ae day o' service done her,
 Lord for ane hour's sunlight upon her,
 Here, fortune, take warld's wealth and honourYou're no my debtor,
 Let me but rive ae link asunder
 O' Erin's fetter.
- "Let me but help to shape the sentence
 Will put the pith o' independence,
 O' self-respect in self-acquaintance
 And manly pride,
 Intil auld Eber Scot's descendants—
 Take a' beside.
- "Let me but help to get the truth
 Set fast in ilka brother's mouth,
 Whatever accent, north or south,
 His tongue may use;
 Aud then ambition, riches, youth—
 Take which you choose."

THE POETRY

OF

SIR SAMUEL FERGUSON.

T.

THE poetry produced in Ireland since Moore ceased to write has certainly been of very remarkable quality, and as certainly is destined to produce an effect in the education of young minds in Ireland during succeeding generations. There are, however, two among these modern poets especially distinguished for their success in fusing and interweaving Gaelic modes of thought and turns of expression with their verse, and thus rendering familiar to us the outward garb and inner soul of the poetry of the Celt. These two are Clarence Mangan and Sir Samuel Ferguson. With the former this power flowed from the prompt and intuitive perceptions of genius. With the latter it was not the result of genius alone, but of extensive acquisition and years of study devoted, in the intervals of his professional labours, to the mastery of all that was to be known concerning the ways and fortunes, the religion, laws, and habitudes of the varied branches of the great Gaelic stem which from time to time have taken root in the soil of Ireland. Not himself a Celt, unless it be from some remote Scottish strain, it has happened to him, as to others, Protestant in religion and Teutonic by extraction, to have his sympathies not exclusively but deeply enlisted on the side of his country and her native people. This spirit breathes through his early translations of Irish verse. What is there more beautiful, what more Irish in soul, than the poem republished in Duffy's "Ballad Poetry of Ireland"?

"A plenteous place is Ireland for hospitable cheer,
Uileachan dubh O!

Where the wholesome fruit is bursting from the yellow barley ear;

Uileachan dubh 0!

There is honey in the trees where her misty vales expand, And her forest paths in summer are by falling waters fanned,

There is dew at high noontide there, and springs i' the yellow sand

On the fair hills of holy Ireland."

To those earlier productions it is our purpose to revert in the second part of this study.

The greatest poem which Sir Samuel Ferguson has written is, in our estimation, his Congal, published in 1872. It is a genuine Irish epic, based, like other epics, upon mingled history and legend, having its roots in the deepest human passions—wrath, love, ambition, revenge, and with these passions shaped by destiny to a fatal end. No poem so Homeric in the march of the narrative, in the character of the heroes, or in the resonant majesty of the versification, has appeared in our time, and withal it is thoroughly and

in essence Celtic. It is not, perhaps, easy at a first reading, unless the reader be singularly attentive, to take in all the features of the story, and all the relations of the personages. We think it a pity that Sir Samuel, instead of prefixing a condensed statement in two lines, brief as the single lines at the head of each book of Homer, did not give us a comprehensive epitome of the whole poem, and then a prose argument of the contents of each book which would make the story plain to everyone. We hope to see this done in a future edition.

The theme is the battle of Muigha Rath or Moyra (the modern Moira), fought in the seventh century of our era, between Congal Claen, hereditary sub-king of Ulster, and Domnal, Ardrigh (high-king) of Ireland, in which the invading forces of Congal are utterly routed and overthrown, and the hero himself is slain. The facts leading up to the catastrophe are these:—

Congal was the son of the renowned Scallan of the Broad Shield. Scallan's ancestors had reigned over the wide Rudrician realm of Ulster; but great portion of it, Tirowen, Tirconnell, and Emain Macha (Armagh) had been torn from them and had passed into the power of other sub-kings. Scallan, though not in possession of all the patrimony of his fathers, yet by strength of character dominated over Ulster and proved himself a redoubted warrior and king. His wife was daughter of Eochaid Buie, King of Alba (Scotland).

Sweeny Menn was, in those days, King of Erin, and

Domnal, son of King Aed, was at feud with him, desirous to usurp his place. With that object he sought the alliance of Scallan of Ulster, and, to bind the alliance faster, took young Congal into his fosterage and nurtured him at his Court of Dunangay, in Meath.

At last, defeated and driven out by the superior power of his head-king, Domnal took refuge with Eochaid Buie in Scotland, bringing the youthful Congal with him. When seven years had flown, and Congal had grown into a daring warrior stripling (Scallan of the Broad Shield being dead), Domnal and he, with a small force, returned to Ireland, and when they landed Domnal vowed to Congal, at least the latter so asserted, that if by force or strategem, allowed by the laws of war, he should slay King Sweeny Menn, and Domnal should sit in his stead as King of Erin, he would restore to Congal not only the dominion held by his father Scallan, but wide Ulster, the realm of his forefathers. Congal, elate in the pride of youth, sought King Sweeny Menn as he sat before his royal palace; and, first raising the warrior shout, which announced and justified the blow, he drove his sword, Garr-Congail, through the heart of Sweeney Menn with such force that it struck the stone bulwark behind him. So terrified were Sweeny's attendants at the blow and the cry, that they believed Congal had a host behind him, and they fled. Sweeny Menn being slain, Domnal reigned in his place as King of Ireland; yet he did not keep his pact. Fearful of

creating too great a power in the King of Ulster, he restored to Congal only the territory Scallan of the Broad Shield had held, leaving Ultan Long-hand King of Orior and Tir-Owen, and yielding to the fierce Malodhar the realm of Emain Macha (Armagh).

Congal, bound by the ties of fosterage, did not then break with his foster-sire, and he soon became entrammelled by a softer tie. He had become deeply enamoured of, and was betrothed to Lafinda, sister of his own tributary sub-king, Sweeny, King of Down, whose palace fortress of Rath-Keltar (Downpatrick) shows, even at this day, by its splendid outline, what it must have been in its undiminished grandeur. Lafinda had been brought up as a princess under the tutelary care of the Nuns of St. Brigid, and she was as pious as she was gentle and beautiful. Congal's love for her and his anticipation of domestic joys had almost subdued in him the impulses of ambition and vengeance. But these passions were destined to a terrible reawakening.

King Domnal was about to hold a high festival in his royal castle of Dunangay, in Meath, and he had sent his envoy, Garrad Gann, to bid Congal with his vassal and future kinsman, Sweeny of Down, to the feast. The poem opens with their departure, attended by their retinue, and accompanied by the envoy, Garrad Gann. Congal bids a brief adieu to Lafinda, assuring her of his speedy return, after having enjoyed the hospitality of his foster-sire. Their bridal should then take place forthwith. So, on a bright May move-

ing, Congal, elate as the lark and radiant as the day, rode forth from the keep of Rath-Keltar upon his southward journey.

But his journey lay through Mourne, and there, in the wild mountain fastnesses, reigned another kinsman, Kellach, the brother of Scallan of the Broad Shield. Kellach was a stern old heathen. Aged, maimed, and crippled, borne in a litter on the shoulders of men, he still nursed within him the fiery passions of pride and He hated Domnal with all his strength, regarding him as a priest-led hypocrite, who shaped all his actions to some sinister and selfish end. But Kellach was magnanimous as he was fierce. He had bestowed, with ungrudging hand, the hospitality of his mountains upon the scattered remnant of the once famous corporation of the bards of Erin, formidable for their organisation, for their terrible powers of invective, and the unscrupulous use they had made of those They were not unnaturally regarded by the Christian clergy as a potent agency of evil. Synod of Drumkeat, held some forty years before the era of our poem, under the presidency of King Aed, father of Domnal, the bards had been condemned and. dispersed. This decree was ratified at subsequent synods, though St. Columba, who looked to reformation rather than extirpation, had raised his voice in their favour. After many wanderings the remnant of the bards now found protection and the necessaries of life from Kellach amid the Mourne solitudes. Despising

Christian observances, they held communion rather with the misty divinities of old Celtic heathendom.

When Congal and his train were riding by Mourne, there came messengers from Kellach, beseeching that he would rest for a day and accept his hospitality. Notwithstanding the remonstrances of Garrad Gann, who had a presentiment of evil to arise from this visit, Congal deemed that it neither became him as a king nor as a kinsman to decline the invitation. So they passed on to the castle gate of Kellach, who was borne out in his litter, and greeted his nephew with overflowing But, immediately after, he broke out into affection. virulent invective against King Domnal. To this Congal replied, with dignity and courtesy, that all quarrels between him and his foster-sire had been appeased, and that he went to ratify that peace at the banquet of Dunangay, as a preliminary to his peaceful and happy nuptials with the Princess Lafinda.

But now, when they passed into the feast and justice had been done to the viands which Kellach had commanded to be spread for them in teeming measure, the bards, by rightful custom, were called on for their songs, and they sang in praise of Erin, her kings and mighty men, and of her growth in the arts of war and peace, until at last the greatest among his brethren, the arch-bard Ardan, seized his harp and attuned its mighty strain to one single theme. That theme was Ulster and the lost rights of her lawful King, Congal Claen. He sang of the beauty and fertility of the land, the

noble hills, the great belts of woods, the rich grassy plains, the deer-abounding forests, and the fishy-teeming lakes and bays. Then he recalled the glorious days of Scallan, when he gave the law over that wide Rudrician realm, from the tumultuous waves of Moyle southward to Dundalga and the waters of Boyne, and from Gweebarra and the cataract of Eas-Roe, eastward to the sea. But this must be given to our readers in the poet's own words:—

"Third, Ardan sang. 'To God who made the elements, I raise

First praises humbly as is meet, and Him I lastly praise; Who sea and land hath meted out beneath the ample sky For man's inhabitation, and set each family

To dwell within his proper bounds; who for the race renowned

Of Rury from old time prepared the fair Ultonian ground, Green-valley'd, clear-stream'd, fishy-bay'd, with mountainmirroring lakes

Belted, with deer-abounding woods and fox-frequented brakes Made apt for all brave exercise; that, till the end of time, Each true Rudrician fair-haired son might from his hills sublime

Look forth and say, "Lo, on the left, from where tumultuous Moyle

Heaves at Benmore's foot-fettering rocks with ceaseless surging toil,

And, half-escaping from the clasp of that stark chain of stone.

The soaring Foreland, poised aloft, as eagle newly flown, Hangs awful on the morning's brow, or rouses armed Cantyre, Red kindling neath the star of eve the Dalriad's warning fire; South to the salt, sheep-fattening marsh and long-resounding bay

Where young Cuchullin camped his last on dread Muirthevne's day;

And southward still to where the weird De Danaan kings lie hid,

High over Boyne, in cavern'd cairn and mountain pyramid;

And on the right hand from the rocks where Balor's bellowing
caves

Up through the funnelled sea-cliffs shoot forth the exploding waves,

South to where lone Gweebarra laves the sifted sands that strow

Dark Boylagh's banks; and southward still to where abrupt Eas-Roe

In many a tawny heap and whirl, by dancing salmon track't, Casts down to ocean's oozy gulfs the great sea-cataract,

The land is ours!—from earth to sea, from hell to heaven

It and its increase, and the crown and dignity thereof!"
Therefore to God, who gave the land into our hand, I sing
First praises, as the law commands; next, to my lawful King,
Image of God, with voice and string, I chant the loyal strain,
Though well-nigh landless here to-day I see thee, Congal
Claen:

Spoiled of Orgallia's green domain, of wide Tir-Owen's woods, Of high Tir-Conal's herdful hills and fishy-teeming floods; Of all the warm vales, rich in goods of glebe-manuring men, That bask against the morning sun along the Royal Glen, These are no longer ours: the brood of Baedan's sons in these Shoot proudly forth their lawless barques, and sweep unhostaged seas

Through all the swift keel-clasping gulfs of ocean that enfold Deep-bay'd Moy Inneray and the shores of Dathi's land of gold.

In law-defying conscious strength aloft in Dunamain Rude Ultan Long-hand owns no lord on Orior's pleasant plain; While o'er Ardsallagh's sacred height, and Creeve Roe's flowery meads.

Molodhar Macha reigns alone in Emain of the steeds.

But come; resound the noble deeds, and swell the chant of praise

In memory of the men who did the deeds of other days;

The old bard-honouring, fearless days, exulting Ulster saw, When to great Rury's fair-haired race, tall Scallan gave the law:

When, from Troy-Rury to Ardstraw was neither fort nor field But yielded tribute to the king that bore the ell-broad shield. Hark! what a shout Ben Evenagh pealed! how flash from sea to shore

The chariot sides, the shielded prows, bright blade and dripping oar:

How smoke their causeways to our tramp: beneath our oarsmen's toil

How, round the Dalaradian prows, foam down the waves of Foyle!

Come forth, ye proud ones of Tir Hugh, your eastern masters wait

To take their tribute rights anew at broad-stoned Aileach's gate;

A hundred steeds, a hundred foals, each foal beside its dam, A hundred pieces of fine gold, each broad as Scallan's palm,

And thick as thumb-nail of a man of churlish birth who now The seventh successive seedtime holds a fallow-furrowing plough:

Three hundred mantles; thirty slaves, all females, young and fair.

Each carrying her silver cup, each cup a poet's share

Who sings an ode inaugural.—Alas! I fondly rave:

Dead, tribute-levying Scallan lies; and dead in Scallan's grave Glory and might and prosperous days. The very heavens that pour'd

Abundance on our fields and streams, while that victorious lord Of righteous judgments ruled the land; the stars that, as they ranged

The bounteous heavens, shed health and wealth, above our heads are changed."

The bard then sang of the brightness and bounty of the heavens and abundance of the fields and streams, now, as it were, blighted and sickened by decadence, and at last bursts forth into a tremendous invective and malediction against the perjured Domnal, and a passionate cry for the return of justice, wealth, and song with the restored and reintegrated throne of King Congal Claen.

"Heaven cannot hold it; but the curse outbursting from on high

In blight and plague, on plant and man, blasts all beneath the sky.

Bursts, blackening clouds that hang aloof o'er perjured Domnal's halls!

Dash down, with all your flaming bolts, the fraud-cemented walls,

Till through your thunder-riven palls heaven's light anew be pour'd

In Law and Justice, Wealth and Song, on Congal's throne restored!"

No wonder that the heart of Congal was stirred to its inmost depths by this passionate appeal to his hidden impulses of ambition and revenge. But not even so did he lose his self-control. Taking his golden torque from his neck, he sent it as a present to the bard, thanking him for all he had said in praise of the race of Rury and the realm of Uladh, but thanking him not for aught that fostered strife or tended to break the lately sworn peace between himself and his foster-father.

Next morning Congal, with Sweeny and their attendants, pursued their southward way by Norrow

Water and the yew trees of Newry and St. Brigid's cell of Killeavy, at the base of Slieve Gullion, on by the fords of Boyne to the royal scat of Domnal, King of Erin, at Dunangay, in Meath.

Tara of the kings was no longer the seat of royalty. It had fallen under the curse of St. Ruan, nearly a century before the date of our story, and lay deserted and lone, and thenceforth, as MacGeoghegan relates, "Every one of the kings of Erin chose himself such a place as in his own discretion he thought fittest and most convenient for him to dwell in." Of Domnal's Castle of Dunangay no trace remains, but it was then a royal fortress in fashion of the time, with earthworks of dyke and mound, forming seven mighty ramparts, with a vast middle hall of timber for the king and his household, a fair assembly hall for each provincial king, and, fairest work of all, a single pillared chamber, emulating that which the famous Cormac in other days had erected at Tara.

Amid the throng of steeds and chariots and the concourse of noble guests, Congal rode into the courtyard of Dunangay; for his youth, stateliness, and beauty, the observed of all observers.

King Domnal stepped down from the threshold of his gate to greet him, kissed him fondly on the cheek, and asked of him that, in token of love and fosterage, he would take at the banquet the place next to his heart at the left hand of the royal throne. "Sire," said Congal, "when the monarch of Ireland is descended, as

thou art, from the race of the Northern Hy-Niall, the place of Ulster should be at thy right hand, but be it according to the prompting of thy love."

So the banquet-hall was thronged and every place therein full save two. Congal sat to the left of the throne. Beside him, to his left, was King Sweeny, of Dalaradia, the brother of his betrothed, and next him Garrad Gann, the envoy, who sought by every art to soothe and pacify the rising gorge of Congal and Sweeny. The two vacant places were the monarch's throne and the seat to his immediate right. The latter was not left long unfilled. Malodhar of Ardmacha came striding into the hall, and looking round with calm audacious glance, seated himself in the right-hand seat, as if already the sovereignty of Ulster were his rightful in-Sweeny could not refrain from arousing heritance. Congal's thought to the pride of this upstart, who usurped what was his own rightful place. But again Garrad Gann intervened with honeyed words, and Congal repressed his passion until another seemingly trifling circumstance caused the cup to overflow.

Last of all came King Domnal into the banquet-hall, the herald proclaiming his greatness and illustrious pedigree; and the Bishop, Ronan Finn, invoked a blessing on the feast.

In that feast, as in the luxurious suppers of the Romans, the first entry was the egg (ab ovo usque ad mala), and an egg of the wild goose was placed before every guest. It was the right of the provincial kings at

royal banquets to be served on silver, and, while this observance was duly fulfilled in every other case, to Congal alone, be it fate, or mischance, or ignorance, his egg was served upon a mean wooden platter. Congal, whose heart was already full, this second slight seemed but insult heaped upon insult. He sprang to his feet, and, dashing down Garrad Gann, who strove to restrain him, he turned to Domnal, and, in burning words of wrath, recapitulated the tale of the splendid services he had done him in fighting his battles, in slaving his rival, and placing him on the throne of Ireland. He dwelt upon the unfulfilled promises of the ungrateful monarch and of his own forgiveness of his foster-father, until he saw the matured design to degrade and dishonour him in the sight of the Princes of Erin. He would raise no affray, nor seek to shed blood at the banquet, but he cast defiance to King Domnal, and called upon his Ulidhian train to follow him forth from that ungracious hall. So they passed out and rode northwards. In vain did King Domnal send after them the Bishop, Ronan Finn, to assure Congal that he meant everything in love and kindness, that he gave him the seat to the left as being truly nearest to his heart, and meant the seat to the right to remain vacant if it had not been seized unbidden by Malodhar. To all these pleadings Congal in his passion was deaf, and the bishop returned with purpose frustrate. The assembly of the royal bards followed him. and to them Congal turned with gracious mien, expressing his shame that, in his haste, he had departed from the hall without bestowing the customary gifts upon the sons of song. This omission he now nobly redeemed, and rode on till he came again to the mountain fastnesses of Mourne.

With what delight he was hailed by Kellach, the implacable enemy of Domnal, may well be conceived. "Thank God I see my brother Scallan's son in such guise as befits a Rudrician prince, with his back to slavery and his face to fortune. Tell me, recount to me all the knave's insidious overtures and wiles. Well I knew him! Well I guessed with what treacherous smiles that feast of his was dressed."

As Congal proceeded in his tale, Kellach kept handling his sword, which none suspected the old cripple of keeping ever beside him. At last he drew it forth. "Listen to my vow," he cried; "many a time has this sword been sheathed in the breasts of foes: it will find its last bloody scabbard in my own bosom if ever you receive from Domnal other recompense for these affronts than full reckoning at the edge of the sword. Cause of quarrel !-- it is abundant and overflowing." the old man narrated many instances of battles fought and kingdoms overthrown on far more slender provocation. "I have seven brave sons," he continued, "every one of whom shall bear arms in your hosting. I myself am not as I was when I fought by Scallan's side: yet, maimed and palsied as I am, so far as I can find men to bear me into the front of battle, in the front of your battle I will be. And yet, dear nephew, this war will need other aids and other councillors. You are too weak for so mighty a strife; depart at once to Scotland. King Eochaid Buie, your mother's father, will give welcome and succour to his grandson. Seek also the King of Britain; he, too, is a kinsman. Return with a great allied host; we, in the meantime, will be assiduous in making preparations among your vassals and friends at home."

Congal departed that very night amid encompassing mists, escorted by the train of exiled bards, who attended him with torches and with battle-song, heralding victory. From the summit of Ben Borcha (highest of the Mourne range after Slieve Donard) was heard a rushing sound, as of a multitude of cattle driven, and with it a whistle and a call. It seemed as if Borcha—in heathen times the spirit herdsman of Ulster—was enlarging his borders and driving in the cattle of wider pastures. Congal, in his cherished desire to be King of all Ulster, as his fathers had been, hailed it as an omen; but the bards went farther. Ardan (heathen at heart) directly invoked the aid of Borcha, addressing him as one who, like the bards themselves, had fallen from a higher place.

Now, in Congal there was a strain of irreverence, if not of impiety, which had been shown in some acts and expressions on his route to Dunangay, and will be manifested in darker relief hereafter. But he stood appalled at this adjuration of unhallowed powers, and declared aloud that he would seek no demon's aid, but begin this enterprise, trusting in the might of valour and of human arms alone.

The mist rolled off, and Congal pursued his way, beneath the stars, back to the fort of Rath Keltar; and there, at earliest morn, he sought an interview with his betrothed, Lafinda. He found her superintending the work of her handmaidens, in fulling a cloak. The scene is truly Homeric, and reminds us of Ulysses and Nausicaa—

"The Princess with her woman-train without the fort he found,

Beside a limpid running stream, upon the primrose ground, In two ranks seated opposite, with soft alternate stroke

Of bare, white, counter-thrusting feet, fulling a splendid cloak

Fresh from the loom: incessant rolled athwart the fluted board

The thick web fretted, while two maids, with arms uplifted, poured

Pure water on it diligently; and to their moving feet In answering verse they sang a chant of cadence clear and sweet.

Princess Lafinda stood beside; her feet in dainty shoes Laced softly; and her graceful limbs in robes of radiant hues

Clad delicately, keeping the time: on boss of rushes made. Old nurse Levarcam near them sat, beneath the hawthorn shade.

A grave experienced woman she, of reverend years, to whom

Well known were both the ends of life, the cradle and the tomb;

Whose withered hands had often smoothed the wounded warrior's bed;

Bathed many new-born babes, and closed the eyes of many dead.

The merry maidens when they spied the warlike king in view,

Beneath their robes in modest haste their gleaming feet withdrew,

And laughing all surceased their task. Lafinda blushing stood

Elate with conscious joy to see so soon again renewed

A converse, ah, how sweet, compared with that of nurse or
maid!

But soon her joy met cruel check."

In brief words Congal told her all—the impending storm of war, and the inevitable delay of their nuptials. Like the daughter of a king, Lafinda accepted what her lover's honour demanded; but as a Christian maiden, she lamented the pride of men who, for a rash word or glance of scorn, jeopardised all they hold dear, and brought war and mourning upon the innocent:—

"Oh, me! what hearts ye own, Proud men, for trivialest contempt in thoughtless moment shown,

For rash word from unguarded lips, for fancied scornful eye,
That put your lives and hopes of them you love in jeopardy.
Yet deem not I, a princess, sprung myself from warrior sires,
Repine at aught in thy behoof that Honour's law requires.
Nor ask I what affront, or how offended, neither where
Blame first may lie. Judge thou of these: these are a warriors care.

Yet, oh, bethink thee, Congal, ere war kindles, of the ties Of nurture, friendship, fosterage; think of the woful sighs Of widows, of poor orphans' cries; of all the pains and griefs. That plague a people in the path of battle-wagering chiefs. See, holy men are 'mongat us come with message sweet of

peace

From God Himself, and promise sure that sin and strife shall cease;

Else wherefore, if with fear and force mankind must ever dwell,

Raise we the pardon-spreading cross and peace-proclaiming cell?"

Congal, full of his purpose, answered with light words, and that evening set sail from Bealfarsad of the ships (Belfast) with his chosen companions in a galley bound for Scotland.

From his grandsire of Scotland Congal received royal welcome and promise of abundant succour. From his uncles, sons of the king, he received the pledge to accompany him and combat by his side. From his kinsmen of Britain he obtained a like pledge. At the court of the latter he was the means of discovering, among rival claimants, the true son of the king, Conan Rodd, who became the most devoted as he was the bravest of his adherents. And he even found auxiliaries in the kings of the lands of the Frank and the Saxon, the Dane and Norwegian. With the great host thus collected, Congal sailed in an evil hour for Erin.

In evil hour, and escorted by evil omens. As the fleet drew nigh to the coast, a cloud of blood seemed to hang over the Dalaradian hills, its edges dropping gore. Scarce had the warriors completed their landing, when a thunderstorm of terrific magnitude burst upon them.

So fierce was the lightning-flame that it set their ships ablaze. From barque to barque the conflagration spread, defying all their power to quench it. "An evil augury," cried the Frankish King. "Nay," said Congal, "be of good cheer, we have shipwrights and carpenters in Ulster skilful and abundant enough to fit out another fleet before our war is over and your time of returning is at hand. Be of good cheer, a stumble at the start is oft the winning of the race."

But old Kellach, who had himself borne to be present at the landing, cried out: "Lift me up, companions; raise me on high, that all may see me, and hear my words. It is a good omen and a great augury this burning of the ships. The hand of heaven has done for you what you should have had spirit to do for yourselves. The great warriors and mighty men of vore never landed on a coast for conquest, but they burned their barques, that flight might be impossible. Then would the fighter break down the bridge behind him, and slay the very steed that bore him to battle, that there might be no issue but victory or death. Exult in what has befallen, and let the rolling cloud above us, with all its red embers, announce to the coward King of Tara that the heroes of the North have once more burned their barques on the coast of Erin." This was loudly applauded, and the host marched inland, and southward.

All that night there was heard a tramp as of giant footsteps around their leaguer. King Congal sprang

. 1

from his couch, and taking spear in hand, and calling his fierce red hound to his side, walked forth into the white mist. He became aware of a monstrous shape striding round the camp, of giant size, with a huge mantle depending from his shoulders, which ever and anon struck against his thighs with a sound as of mainsail flapping upon mast. It was invisible to all save Congal. Three times the monstrous thing made its rounds, and only on the third round did Congal's hound spring forward, and then he himself accosted the shape. The giant form passed on in silence, and Congal then pursued him, calling on him with opprobrious words.

The giant turned for a moment, and opening the folds of his cloak, sent forth such a prodigious blast of wind, that Congal and his hound were swept before it down into the valley.

This apparition was Mananan Mac Lir, the sea-god of the Tuatha de Danaan.* Banished by the more potent spirits of the Druids, who came with Milesius, banished more effectually by the Cross, the demon still made his appearance on dread occasions, and he who then met him, and spoke with him, learned what would befall within the coming year. But he who bespake him, and received no reply, would within the year infallibly die. So Bard Ardan expounded to Congal, and Congal answered, "Be it so."

• "Their ocean-god was Mananan Mac Lir,
Whose angry lips
In their white foam full often would inter
Whole fleets of ships."
Thomas Darcy M'Gee.

But he had not yet supped his fill of horrors. Next morning, as the host marched over the ford of Ullarva (Larne water), they beheld a spectacle which might well freeze the blood within their veins. A hag stood in the middle of the ford up to her knees, engaged in washing the bloody corpses, the severed limbs and heads of innumerable men. Down to her the stream flowed pure and pellucid; when it passed her, it was red as gore. The soldiery shrank back appalled. Kellach bade his bearers carry him on into the stream, but they dared not for fear. Congal himself came forth and addressed the hideous apparition; and she thus replied:—

"'I am the Washer of the Ford,' she answered; 'and my race Is of the Tuath de Danaan line of Magi; and my place For toil is in the running streams of Erin; and my cave For sleep is in the middle of the shell-heaped Cairn of Maev,

High up on haunted Knocknarea; and this fine carnageheap

Before me, in these silken vests and mantles which I steep Thus in the running water, are the severed heads and hands And spear-torn scarfs and tunics of these gay-dressed, gallant bands

Whom thou, O Congal, leadest to death. And this,' the Fury said,

Uplifting by the clotted locks what seemed a dead man's head,

'Is thine head, O Congal.'

Therewith she rose in air,
And vanished from the warrior's view, leaving the river
bare

Of all but running water. But Congal drew his sword

And with a loud-defying shout, plunged madly in the ford, Probing the empty pools; then stood, and from the middle flood

Exclaimed:

'Here stand I, and here swear that till the tide of blood

Thus laves my knees, I will not turn for threat of Devil or Ghost.

Fairy or lying Spirit accurst, while one of all this host Follows my leading.'"

One alone accompanied Congal-Conan Rodd, son of the King of Britain. Kellach, from his litter, cried out upon the burning shame to the sons of Ulster, to see their king confronting that ghastly vision with none to second him save the son of the stranger. know her, the accursed hag," he said. "It is now fourteen years since I beheld her as now, seeking to terrify brave men with her spells. It was at Troy-Brena, in Donegal, when I fought by the side of Domnal and Scallan Broad-Shield, against King Sweeny Menn. As we crossed the quagmire near the lockhead, we saw her engaged in washing, and we shook to see the grisly pile of carnage before her. Every man deemed he saw his own head lying in the stream. saw my own, and yet from that fight came I scathless forth, and I hold her prophecies in scant regard. Would to heaven my limbs had been then as stiff as now they are before I fought in thankless Domnal's battle; or would they were now swift and supple as then, or else you should never see me here and Conan Rodd there!" The abashed Ulstermen plunged into the stream, and the host continued its southward march. But it seemed as if heaven itself had joined with the unhallowed powers to deter Congal from his enterprise. His own Lafinda came to meet him in her open chariot, driven by her ancient nurse, Laverca. As he sprang to greet her, she implored him in earnest tones to proceed no further. That night her patroness, the holy Brigid of Kildare, had appeared to her, and commanded her to warn Congal of the impending wrath of heaven if he persisted in his warfare against his countrymen.

Congal put her vision lightly aside, treating it as an idle dream, and besought her to take such refreshment as his tent could afford, and then accept princely escort back to her brother's palace, and when the short-lived war would be over, and the pride of Domnal abated, they would hold their nuptials in royal pomp.

"'Congal,' the Princess pale, replied, 'no bridal pomp for me Is destined, if thou hearkenest not to Brigid's embassy; Save haply such a bridal pomp as, entering Brigid's cell, A handmaiden of Christ may hope.'

Said he, 'The powers of hell Have sought to turn me, and have failed; and though in thee

My only heaven, yet neither thou shalt bind my steadfast mind.'

'Ah, me,' she cried. 'What fate is mine! The daughter of a king,

Wooed by a king, and well content to wear the marriage ring; Who never knew the childish want nor granted, nor desire Of maiden bosom, but good saints and angels would conspire To bring the innocent wish to pass: who with the streams and flowers,

So happy was I, turned to joy the very passing hours

From flowery earth and fragrant air, and all sweet sounds and sights

Filling my heart, from morn to eve, with fresh and pure delights—

Just when, in bloom of life, I said 'this world is wondrous fair,'

Now in one hour see nothing left, to live for, but despair."

Old Kellach cried out scornfully from his chair: "Princess, these are but the dreams of maidens, which vanish when they are wed, and they will all vanish when, after this battle won, thou art brought home to the royal bed of the King of Ulster." The nurse rebuked him in stern language for his profanity, and he in turn, with redoubled scorn, told her that they had that morn defied even an older and uglier hag than she.

The nurse wheeled round the steeds and impelled them to depart, but in departing her presence stood revealed. It was St. Brigid herself, who in the form of the nurse had accompanied Lafinda to make this last and fruitless dissuasion.

Congal cried aloud in his pride, and wrath, and irreverence: "Thou robber saint, restore my bride." He flung his spear with all his might at one of the horses that drew the car of the saint; but Brigid, with a gesture of her hand, waved the spear aside, so that it fell

wide and harmless. She and Lafinda then vanished from their sight.

These supernatural visitations filled the host with The Frankish king declared that he had taken up arms to aid Congal against King Domnal but not against the King of Heaven, and he counselled them to proceed no further, but, on the spot, to found a splendid cell and dedicate it to St. Brigid, and then, in her name, profess peace to King Domnal, claiming from him safe conduct and ships to convey them home. In the meantime, he said, let us encamp and fortify ourselves on this spot to await what may betide. Various were the opinions, discordant the words. Some were for drawing back to the coast and fortifying themselves there until their friends could send ships to succour Others applauded the idea of appeasing the wrath of Brigid, but, that done, to prosecute the war. But when Conan Rodd, son of the King of Britain, sprang to his feet, all were hushed in silence. clared aloud that such preternatural warfare as was now surrounding them was his dream from his earliest youth; that, in the legends of the days of old, he had heard of the strife of heroes with gods and giants, and burned to partake of such adventures, but had never realised them until he touched the mystic soil of Ireland, nor had he seen a hero or captain whom he could follow heart and soul until he looked upon the face of Congal Claen.

THE POETRY OF SIR SAMUEL FERGUSON.

"Wherefore with awful joy elate, I stand; and bid thee hail, Last hero-stage of all the world, illustrious Innisfail! Land of the lingering gods! green land, still sparkling fresh and fair

With morning dew of heroism dried up and gone elsewhere!

The battle was now at hand. King Domnal, with all the powers of Erin, was marching to the plain of Moira.

Domnal had the better cause. He fought for his country against a host of barbarian invaders; for Christianity and the rites of Patrick and Brigid against a refluent wave of heathenism. Nor was his character such as his enemies, in their hatred, portrayed it. He was, in truth, a valiant and sagacious leader. He sincerely lamented the war. The insult to Congal was either undesigned or meant as a test of character, and he would almost at any price have won him back.

The rival kings made heart-stirring addresses to their followers. Congal, at the head of many nations, pagan and Christian, bespoke them, recalling the various memories of their national glories and exploits, with a special exhortation to his own Rudrician kinsmen. But the evil element of pride and impiety latent in him had now grown to a head. He vowed that if victory were given to his standard he would reverse the decrees of Drumkeat, restore the bards to all their ancient honours, and disperse the Christian clergy, so that within a twelvemonth there should not exist one of those "proud curse-fulminers" within the land.

Domnal's troops were all the sons of Erin from her many provinces—Lagenia, Connacia, Momonia, and Ultonia itself westward of the Bann. Not one of these but had its own heroic legend and spirit-stirring history. To each in turn he addressed appropriate words of fire, but, above all, he appealed to the more sacred cause which he defended, their eternal hope and faith in Christ.

"' For surely never yet
Was juster war defensive waged than this, wherein, beset
As deer in hunter's narrowing ring, or ring'd bull at his stake,
We needs must fight for leave to live, if not for glory's sake.
Behold, there breathes not on the earth the creature born so
base

But will, to spending of its life, defend its dwelling-place; Be it the wolf's leaf-bedded lair, the rook's dark tops of trees, Or bare shelf of the barren rock, where, over yeasty seas. The artless gull intends her brood; and baser than the beasts Were we, if, having to defend our homes of love, our feasts Of joyous friendship, our renown, our freedom, and above All else, our heavenly heritage of Christ's redeeming love, From this rude inroad unprovoked of Gentile robbers, we Fought not the fight of valiant men to all extremity; As well beseeming those for whom the sacred lay was sung:

Up, God? and let the foes of God, and them that hate him, fly:

As wax consumes within the fire, as smoke within the sky, So let them melt and perish quite: but he who loves thy laws His head in battle cover Thou, and vindicate his cause.'

'Amen,' Cloc-Patrick's clerks replied; and clear above the swell

Of thousand hoarse-applauding throats, was heard the Standard-Bell."

"And, as when fire by chance has caught a furzy mountain side,

Behind its bickering front of flame, in blackness swift and wide,

The spreading ruin onward rolls; so down King Domnal's van.

Flashed back from glittering helm and shield, the morning radiance ran;

So, dark behind their fiery front, in far evolving throng

The enlarging legions spread, and poured their serried strength along

And as, again, when Lammas floods from echoing uplands go

Down hurrying to the quaking vale that toils in foam below:

So wide, so deep, so terrible, so spreading, swift and vast,

With tempest-tramp from Congal's camp the adverse columns pass'd;

Every phalanx like a castle; every captain, at its head,

Like pillar of a castle-gate, when camping kings have spread Their leaguer to the rampart-foot, and pick and broad-axe

play
Rebounding on the sounding plank that holds the war at

Ah! many a brave young son was there, to hang on whose broad breast

Was joy to the proud mother; many a brother much caressed

By white-arm'd smiling sisters; many a lover who yet bore The parting kiss from virgin lips his lips should meet no more:

And sons who stood by fathers' sides, with pious ardour warm,

Each deeming death were well incurred to shield that head from harm,

Blooming in love and manly strength; and many a faithful pair

Of milk-united fosterers and ancient friends was there.

Swiftly they cleared the narrowing space of plain ground interposed;

And, bearing each an even front, from wing to wing they closed.

A shudder at the closing shock thrill'd through the grassy plain,

And all the sedgy-sided pools of Lagan sighed again."

The details of the battle are told in true Homeric style. At the very beginning another terrible omen fell upon the Ultonian ranks. King Sweeny, of Rath Keltar, brother of Congal's bride, had, in the return from Dunangay, struck down an aged hermit, Erc, who, on the banks of Boyne, stood to warn them of the wrath of heaven. Sweeny struck him and flung him into the waters of Boyne where he was drowned; and now, when he stood face to face with his foes, he could see nothing but the awful figure of Erc confronting him with uplifted hand. Seized with a preternatural frenzy of fear, he burst through the ranks behind him and fled with the speed of the wind.

We cannot pause upon the incidents of the battle, as it raged and swayed to and fro. Congal himself outshone every hero in the field, and the noblest and bravest of the Irish went down before him. Next to him in valour was his brother-in-arms, Conan Rodd. The latter met a glorious end at the hands of the son of King Malcova, of Meath. But Congal was reserved for a strange and almost ignominious fate. The story presents something of those grotesque features which mark

and at times deform our Celtic legends. He was slain by an idiot, by Cuanna, son of King Ultan Long-hand. Taunted by his step-mother with remaining idly at home, while his father and other brave men were fighting for their country, Cuanna, after a vain demand to give him arms, seized upon a bill-hook for a weapon and the lid of a cauldron for a shield, and, thus apparelled, rushed from Dunamain to the plains of Moyra, arriving in the very heat of the battle, nor did he stop nor stay until he found himself face to face with Congal. Congal laughed aloud and cried out in scorn of King Domnal, who brought lunatics and fools in such array to battle. Cuanna said to him, "Do not mock me or any man's son who comes here to do his best." "Forgive me," said Congal, "and take not my words in anger, but battle is no concern of thine." And he would have passed on, but Cuanna raised his bill-hook, and, with mighty stroke, drove it into Congal's side, piercing the rings of his mail.

Congal knew that he had received his death-wound, but he scorned to take vengeance on the idiot youth. He drew out the weapon and girt tight his belt around the wound, standing erect to continue the fight while life was in him. The son of Malcova, the same who had slain Conan Rodd, proffered him quarter, but just at that moment a fearful tempest descended from heaven, and the invaders, who had everywhere been broken and driven back by the forces of Erin, now seized with a universal panic, turned and fled, bearing the dying

Congal with them in their flight. The only man who did not and would not fly was old Kellach. His seven sons had all been slain one by one before him, and he sat in his litter awaiting death, thanking God that no son of his had trod or could now tread the path of shame. But even for him King Domnal had compassion.

"But keen-eyed Domnal, where he stood to view the rout, ere long

Spying that white unmoving head amid the scattering throng, Exclaimed, 'Of all their broken host one only man I see Not flying; and I therefore judge him impotent to be Of use of limb. Go: take alive,' he cried, 'and hither fetch The hoary-haired unmoving man: 'tis Kellach, hapless wretch.

The very author of the war. There lives not on the face Of earth a man stands so in need of God's forgiving grace:

And—for he was my father's friend, and that white helpless head

Stirs my compassion—though my foe, I would not see him sped

Unshrived to that accounting dread; if yet your pious care, O Pontiffs, may prevail to bend his stubborn heart to prayer."

Kellach's heart remained stubborn and unmoved. He died in his pride and hate under the ban of the Church, unshriven and unrepentant.

But God had mercy upon Congal. When the flight began, he had swooned from his hurt, and Bard Ardan caught him up into his car, and the steeds bore him unconscious back into his native vales of Antrim. Then, taken from the car, and laid upon the ground, reviving sense came back, bringing with it but anguish and despair.

Yet other thoughts, "how sent let faith divine," came upon the unhappy Congal. He thought of his own pride, of his unjust and sacrilegious war against his native land, of all the generous friends who, through him, had perished, and of their bereaved wives and orphans. And tears, repentant tears, "let faith divine their source," burst plentifully forth.

The spot to which, by the care of Providence, he had been borne was close beside a cell of St. Brigid, and, when now calmed by repentance, he was aware of a veiled religious maid coming across the lawn. He knew at once the peerless gesture and indelible grace, but she at first knew him not.

"She, when she saw the wounded man was Congal, stood and prayed

A little space, and trembled much: then came, and meekly said.

'Sir, thou art wounded; and I come from Brigid's cell hard by

To tend thy wants, if thou wilt brook a sister's charity.'

'And is my aspect also, then, so altered,' Congal cried,

'That thou, Lafinda, knowest me not, that shouldst have been my bride?'

'Bride now of Christ,' she answered low; 'I know thee but as one

For whom my heavenly Spouse has died.'

'And other nuptials none

Desire I for thee now,' he said; 'for nothing now is mine, Save the fast-fleeting breath of life I hasten to resign.'"

She bound his wounds, gently tended him, and then asked him if his heart had repented of its sins.

"She bound his wounds, and asked him! 'Has thy heart At all repented of its sins, unhappy that thou art?'

'My sins,' said Congal, 'and my deeds of strife and bloodshed seem

No longer mine, but as the shapes and shadows of a dream; And I myself, as one oppressed with sleep's deceptive shows, Awaking only now to life, when life is at its close.'

'Oh, grant,' she cried, with tender joy, 'Thou, who alone canst save.

That this awaking be to light and life beyond the grave!'

'Twas then the long-corroded link of life's mysterious chain

Snapped softly, and his mortal change passed upon Congal Claen."

In the foregoing pages we have sought rather to enlist the reader's interest in the march of the narrative and the picture of ancient Irish manners and ideas which the poem presents, than to direct his attention to its beauties of imagery and diction. But there is one passage which we cannot refrain from extracting. When Congal was dying, a shape seemed to pass before his eyes, the vision of which affected him as one long pent within doors would be touched at heart by the joy of beholding some incomparable panorama ranging over land and sea, while every sense is fed by pure delights. Something of the same thoughts is in Gray, but it is far more fully and richly elaborated here and with a masterly pencil, while the thought with which it is concluded—

the feeling of humility and repentance which the very contemplation of the unsullied glories of the Creator's works brings home to sinful man—is as true as it is beautifully expressed.

"No longer soiled with stain of earth, what seemed his mantle shone

Rich with innumerable hues refulgent, such as one

Beholds, and thankful-hearted he, who casts abroad his gaze

O'er some rich tillage-country side, when mellow autumn days

Gild all the sheafy foodful stooks; and, broad before him spread,—

He looking landward from the brow of some great seacape's head,

Bray or Ben-Edar—sees beneath in silent pageant grand,

Slow fields of sunshine spread o'er fields of rich corn-bearing land;

Red glebe or meadow-margin green commingling to the view

With yellow stubble, browning woods, and upland tracts of blue;—

Then, sated with the pomp of fields, turns, sea-ward, to the verge

Where, mingling with the murmuring wash made by the far-down surge,

Comes up the clangorous song of birds unseen, that low beneath,

Poised off the rock, ply underfoot; and, 'mid the blossoming heath,

And mint-sweet herb that loves the ledge rare-aired, at ease reclined,

Surveys the wide pale-heaving floor crisped by a curling wind;

With all its shifting, shadowy belts, and chasing scopes of green,

Sun-strown, foam-freekled, sail-embossed, and blackening squalls between,

And slant, cerulean-skirted showers that with a drowsy sound,

Heard inward, of ebullient waves, stalk all the horizon round;

And—haply, being a citizen just 'scaped from some disease That long has held him sick indoors, now, in the brinefresh breeze,

Health-salted, bathes; and says, the while he breathes reviving bliss,

'I am not good enough, O God, nor pure enough for this!""

II.

In the "Noctes Ambrosianæ" of Blackwood, Christopher North (Professor Wilson) vehemently combats the class of critics who deny that poetry, poetry of a high order, can arise from art, even mechanical art. when blended with and elevated to the ideal. One would have thought that to sustain his position against such "shallow and senseless critics," as he names them, Christopher needed but to have referred to the forging of the shield of Achilles in Homer, or to Schiller's "Lav of the Bell." However, he relies on neither of these, but he recites at length, to the admiration of his friends, a poem, then for the first time published, "The Forging of the Anchor." When he had finished, the second great personage of the "Noctes" asks him: "Is the 'Forging of the Anchor' your own, Kit?" to which Christopher replies: "I wish it were. But the world will yet hear of the writer. Belfast gave him birth, and he has the same name with a true poet of our own-Ferguson. Maga will be proud of introducing him to the world."

The "Forging of the Anchor" has been reproduced innumerable times. It is far too well known for us to deem it necessary to lay any extract from it before our readers. Our object, moreover, is not simply to manifest Ferguson as a poet of whom Ireland should be

justly proud, but as that poet whose aim and mission it has been to clothe the old Gaelic life and Gaelic thought in the tongue which Ireland now speaks. And yet there is one of his early poems which we cannot bring ourselves to omit. With nothing distinctly Celtic in its structure or colouring it has that indescribable charm of tenderness and delicacy (molle atque facetum), the charm not only of feeling but of finish, which, if we do not deceive ourselves, is found more amongst the poets of Ireland than elsewhere. It is termed the "Forester's Complaint:"

"Through our wild wood-walks here, Sunbright and shady, Free as the forest deer Roams a lone lady: Far from her castle-keep, Down in the valley, Roams she, by dingle deep. Green holm and alley, With her sweet presence bright Gladd'ning my dwelling-Oh, fair her face of light, Past the tongue's telling! Woe was me E'er to see Beauty so shining; Ever since, hourly, Have I been pining!

"In our blithe sports' debates

Down by the river,

I, of my merry mates,

Foremost was ever;

Skilfullest with my flute,
Leading the maidens
Heark'ning by moonlight, mute,
To its sweet cadence:
Sprightliest in the dance
Tripping together—
Such a one was I once
Ere she came hither!
Woe was me
E'er to see
Beauty so shining;
Ever since, hourly,
Have I been pining!

"Loud now my comrades laugh As I pass by them; Broadsword and quarter-staff No more I ply them: Coy now the maidens frown Wanting their dances: How can their faces brown Win one, who fancies Even an angel's face Dark to be seen would Be, by the Lily-grace Gladd'ning the greenwood? Woe was me E'er to see Beauty so shining: Ever since, hourly, Have I been pining!

"Wolf, by my broken bow
Idle is lying,
While through the woods I go
All the day, sighing,

Tracing her footsteps small
Through the moss'd cover,
Hiding then, breathless all,
At the sight of her,
Lest my rude gazing should
From her haunt scare her—
Oh, what a solitude
Wanting her, there were!
Woe was me
E'er to see
Beauty so shining;
Ever since, hourly,
Have I been pining!

Still more tender and pathetic is "The Fairy Thorn." The superstition on which it is founded is Ulster-Irish, and it possesses no Gaelic colouring in the language, but yet how Celtic it is in its dreamy and mystic supernaturalism. A presence not of earth pervades and breathes from the sinking twilight.

"' Get up, our Anna dear, from the weary spinning-wheel;
For your father's on the hill, and your mother is asleep:
Come up above the crags, and we'll dance a highland reel
Around the fairy thorn on the steep.'

"But solemn is the silence of the silvery haze

That drinks away their voices in echoless repose,

And dreamily the evening has still'd the haunted braes,

And dreamier the gloaming grows.

And sinking one by one, like lark-notes from the sky
When the falcon's shadow saileth across the open shaw,
Are hush'd the maidens' voices, as cowering down they lie
In the flutter of their sudden awe.

- "For, from the air above, and the grassy ground beneath,
 And from the mountain-ashes and the old white-thorn
 between,
 - A Power of faint enchantment doth through their beings breathe,

And they sink down together on the green.

- * * * *
- "Thus clasp'd and prostrate all, with their heads together bow'd

Soft o'er their bosoms' beating—the only human sound— They hear the silky footsteps of the silent fairy crowd, Like a river in the air, gliding round.

- "No scream can any raise, nor prayer can any say,
 But wild, wild, the terror of the speechless three—
 For they feel fair Anna Grace drawn silently away,
 By whom they dare not look to see.
- "They feel their tresses twine with her parting locks of gold, And the curls elastic falling, as her head withdraws; They feel her sliding arms from their tranced arms unfold, But they may not look to see the cause:
- "For heavy on their senses the faint enchantment lies
 Through all that night of anguish and perilous amaze;
 And neither fear nor wonder can ope their quivering eyes
 Or their limbs from the cold ground raise,
- "Till out of night the earth has roll'd her dewy side,
 With every haunted mountain and streamy vale below;
 When, as the mist dissolves in the yellow morning tide,
 The maidens' trance dissolveth so.
- "Then fly the ghastly three as swiftly as they may,
 And tell their tale of sorrow to anxious friends in vain—
 They pined away and died within the year and day,
 And ne'er was Anna Grace seen again."

If Sir Samuel Ferguson had continued to produce compositions rivalling or excelling "The Forging of the Anchor," "The Forester's Complaint," "The Fairy Thorn," the ballad of "Willy Gilliland," and other poems of his youth, it cannot be questioned that he would have earned, and would in the future have achieved, a high place among the English poets of this era. Whether he would have won it in his own day is more questionable, when we consider the character of the verse which finds favour with the English public of this generation. It has happened now, as at other periods, that fashion has for a time forsaken what is essential and perennial in poetry for the worship of artificial and temporary form. Height, tenderness, grace, simplicity, originality, are little thought of, and in their place what is laboriously sought after is a certain conventional twining of words and phrases, a frigid idolatry of sensual passion, and alliteration abso-The "raging rocks and shivering lutely run mad. shocks" of the great Bully Bottom, whatever they may have meant to satirize in Shakespeare's day, are but mild ridicule of much that finds favour in our own. Could a greater proof of the degeneracy of English taste in poetry be found than this, that every poetaster who is able to string together some imitative verbal extravagances, thinks himself entitled to speak contemptuously of Thomas Moore. With writing of this kind Sir Samuel Ferguson could have no part or lot. Moreover, his true mission lay elsewhere.

We spoke in a former page of the wonderful attraction which the Celtic nature always had for him: such attraction it never fails to exercise over men of genius, in whose composition the refined and tender elements predominate. Those by whom the Celt is despised and spurned are the worshippers of strength, domination, and success. With what affectionate yearnings the poet of whom we write turns not only to his own countrymen, but to their kith and kin beyond the seas, may be read in his beautiful "Adieu to Brittany," portion of which we give:

- "Rugged land of the granite and oak,
 I depart with a sigh from thy shore,
 And with kinsman's affection a blessing invoke
 On the maids and the men of Arvôr.
- "For the Irish and Breton are kin,
 Though the lights of Antiquity pale
 In the point of the dawn where the partings begin
 Of the Bolg, and the Kymri, and Gael.
- "But, though dim in the distance of time
 Be the low-burning beacons of fame,
 Holy Nature attests us, in writing sublime
 On heart and on visage, the same.
- "In the dark-eyelash'd eye of blue gray,
 In the open look, modest and kind,
 In the face's fine oval reflecting the play
 Of the sensitive, generous mind.
- "Till, oft as by meadow and stream
 With thy Maries and Josephs I roam,
 In companionship gentle and friendly I seem,
 As with Patrick and Brigid at home.

- "Green, meadow-fresh, streamy-bright land!
 Though greener meads, valleys as fair,
 Be at home, yet the home-yearning heart will demand,
 Are they blest as in Brittany there?
- "Demand not—repining is vain:
 Yet, would God, that even as thou
 In thy homeliest homesteads, contented Bretagne,
 Were the green isle my thoughts are with now !
- "But I call thee not golden: let gold

 Deck the coronal troubadours twine,

 Where the waves of the Loire and Garomna are roll'd

 Through the land of the white wheat and vine,
- "And the fire of the Frenchman goes up
 To the quick-thoughted dark-flashing eye:
 While Glory and Change quaffing Luxury's cup,
 Challenge all things below and on high.
- "Leave to him—to the vehement man
 Of the Loire, of the Seine, of the Rhone—
 In the Idea's high pathways to march in the van,
 To o'erthrow, and set up the o'erthrown.
- "Be it thine in the broad beaten ways
 That the world's simple seniors have trod,
 To walk with soft steps, living peaceable days,
 And on earth not forgetful of God,
- "Nor repine that thy lot has been cast
 With the things of the old time before,
 For to thee are committed the keys of the past,
 O gray monumental Arvôr!"

We must pass to Sir Samuel Ferguson's adaptation and treatment of the Celtic legends. Amongst these by far the most famous is the *Tain Bo Cuailgne*, or "Cattle Spoil of Cooley," the invasion of Ulster by Meav, Queen of Connaught, and the repelling of the invasion, through the glorious valour of Cuchullin, the Celtic Achilles. Sir Samuel has not dealt with the central story of this cycle but has rather devoted himself to the earlier incidents and collateral branches of the mythus, including the narrative of the betrayal of the Children of Usnach, which in its tragic and fateful character may rival one of the stories of the destiny befalling great houses, which formed the themes of early Grecian poetry and drama.

The time is before the Christian era, yet close on its In those days Fergus Mac Roy was King of Ulster. Valiant and skilful in war, ardent in the chase, loving the songs of bards and his own tuneful thoughts, loving also the royal banquet and carouse, Fergus was deficient in the greatest of kingly qualities—the aptitude for patient and painful labour in the discharge of his royal duties. Thus the long sitting at the council board, the weighing and deciding of the intricate claims of suitors and litigants who appealed to the tribunal of the king were to him distasteful and repulsive. And this distaste increased as he became deeply enamoured of Nessa, the widow of Prince Fathna, and the mother by him of Conor, afterwards known as King Conor Mac Nessa, who made that name famous and infamous. Fergus wooed the fascinating Nessa to be his wife, and he won her upon the terms that her son, a youth of the brightest promise, should sit at his right hand at the

council board. Conor, thoughtful, ambitious, cool, self centred, possessed the qualities in which Fergus wa wanting. And so it chanced that one day at counci there arose a litigated question, weighty and involved in which the decision upon the right and the wrong demanded the most minute and patient attention to the details, and the clearest judgment as to the arguments. The dreamy and uxorious Fergus felt that the case has escaped him, and that to make a decision was impossible. So, scorning an affectation of knowing what he did not know, he turned to Conor and said, "Bojudge, do thou decide." How Conor fulfilled the tasl thus cast upon him we will let the poet tell in the person of Fergus himself:

- "Conor, with unalter'd mien, In a clear, sweet voice serene, Took in hand the tangled skein And began to make it plain.
- "As a sheep-dog sorts his cattle, As a king arrays his battle, So the facts on either side He did marshal and divide.
- "Every branching side-dispute
 Traced he downward to the root
 Of the strife's main stem, and there
 Laid the ground of difference bare.
- "Then to scope of either cause Set the compass of the laws. This adopting, that rejecting, Reasons to a head collecting—

- "As a charging cohort goes
 Through and over scatter'd foes,
 So, from point to point, he brought
 Onward still the weight of thought.
- "Through all error and confusion, Till he set the clear conclusion Standing like a king alone, All things adverse overthrown,
- "And gave judgment clear and sound— Praises fill'd the air around; Yea, the man that lost the cause Hardly could withhold applause.
- "By the wondering crowd surrounded
 I sat shamefaced and confounded.
 Envious ire awhile oppress'd me
 Till the nobler thought possess'd me;
- "And I rose, and on my feet
 Standing by the judgment-seat,
 Took the circlet from my head,
 Laid it on the bench, and said:
- "' Men of Uladh, I resign
 That which is not rightly mine,
 That a worthier than I
 May your judge's place supply.
- "'Lo, it is no easy thing

 For a man to be a king

 Judging well, as should behove

 One who claims a people's love.

"" Uladh's judgment-seat to fill
I have neither wit nor will.
One is here may justly claim
Both the function and the name.

"'Conor is of royal blood;
Fair he is; I trust him good;
Wise he is we all may say
Who have heard his words to-day.

"'Take him, therefore, in my room, Letting me the place assume— Office but with life to end— Of his councillor and friend.'

"So young Conor gain'd the crown; So I laid the kingship down; Laying with it as I went All I knew of discontent."

And so Conor Mac Nessa ascended the throne of Fergus Mac Roy, and reigned over Ulster. Fergus may well have doubted, like Tennyson's earl, whether he showed himself great or mean, noble or ignoble. He retired willingly from the troubles of a throne to the delights of the chase, and poetry, and domestic happiness, his generous nature making him ever prompt to aid his stepson with his mature counsel in every difficulty.

Conor, as might be expected, proved himself a wise and vigilant, resolute and cunning administrator of his realm. But the evil that lurks in every selfish character was certain to manifest itself soon or late. And this brings us to the fate of Deirdre and of the Sons of Usnach.

When King Conor Mac Nessa reigned over Ulster, the great houses of the nobles or knights of the Red (or royal) Branch were the champions and props of the Ulidian throne; and amongst these the house of Usnach was the first in nobility and valour. And to Usnach were given three goodly sons—Naisi, Ainle, and Ardan. The mutual love of Naisi and the beautiful Deirdre—a love pure and honourable—was the cause that wrought the woe and ruin which afterwards befell.

Deirdre was the daughter of Felim, chief among the bards at the court of King Conor Mac Nessa. from her infancy her loveliness was a wonder. the banshee shrieked with despairing cry at her birth, and the chief druid foretold that she was born for the destruction of the princes of Ulster. And the babe would have been put to death by the judgment of the Ultonian nobles but that the two bravest among them, Conall Carnach and the young Cuchullin, intervened and forbade the sacrifice. Then King Conor decreed that she should be brought up in a lonely island in a lake, with a nurse and druid for her sole companions, designing, if her ripening beauty corresponded with her infant promise, to make her the partner of his own royal bed. He had been deserted by his former Queen, Maey, whose fierce and domineering temper found in him neither a master nor a subject. Their marriage had been one eternal warfare. So she left him and became the wife of Ailill, and Queen of Connaught, destined to lead invading hosts into the realm of her

former spouse. But to return to Deirdre. In the lonely island she grew to girlhood, more than realising her predicted charms of form, and in mind quick, intelligent, and inquisitive, learning all that her nurse and tutor could teach her, and learning still more from all of animate and inanimate in nature that surrounded The king from time to time visited her to gaze upon her growing loveliness; but she shrank with silent repulsion from his now grizzled aspect and stern demeanour. And it chanced that in the winter the white snow was crimsoned with the blood of a woodpigeon which an eagle had slain. Presently a raven came to taste the blood, and the nurse, Levarcam, drew Deirdre's attention to the three colours-black, white. and red-which she said were the proper hues of love; and she discoursed to her of the young Naisi, eldest of the sons of Usnach, in whose raven hair and blooming countenance those colours met.

Naisi, one day returning from the chase, came upon the causeway which united the island of Deirdre with the mainland. There he met the maiden, and in that hour their fate was sealed. Ere they parted they were betrothed. Such was the power of the Knights of the Red Branch, such the popularity of the house of Usnach, that Conor was forced to dissemble his resentment and permit Naisi to bring home his bride with all pomp and pageantry. But, as Homer truly says, dreadful is the wrath of a king when it is inflamed against a subject; for, though he may cover his enmity for a time,

he always lies in wait for the destruction of those whom he hates. Conor never relinquished his passion for Deirdre, nor forsook his design of getting her into his power. The character of Deirdre, as portrayed in the legend, shines forth with singular beauty. All the romance of nature which she had hived and secreted in her insular seclusion was poured forth without stint upon her husband. But she was gifted with an intellectual discernment far beyond his-with that feminine insight which penetrates the real designs of men. and is prescient of coming danger. She felt that the king was spreading a net for their destruction, and she prevailed upon Naisi to take refuge in flight. His two brothers, devoted and loyal to him, accompanied them, and they fled to Scotland and made their home in the solitudes of Glen Etive. There, in the excitement of the chase, in one another's society and conversation, and the indoor recreation of chess, they passed their existence. All were happy but Naisi himself. loving Deirdre, truly appreciating and returning the devotion of his brothers, he yet pined in exile: he yearned to be back in Erin, to take his part in war and council, in all the struggles of a virile, civil, and martial career. It is in the midst of this tranquil life in the highland loughs and glens that Sir Samuel Ferguson's poem finds them. It is cast in the form of a drama. Thus are the natural and blameless but illfated repinings of Naisi described :-

DEIRDRE.

"Were the world Peopled but by us two, I were content.

NAISI.

"Not so with me. Love makes the woman's life Within doors and without; but, out of doors, Action and glory make the life of man. Here I have room for neither: here there's room Only for solitudes interminable, For desert vastness and vacuity. I see von wave that never felt a keel. Since first it rose, break white along the beach So far beneath my feet, I hear it not. The winds that whistle by me through the grass Bring never sound of life but 'tis a beast Or bird that sends it; save, perchance, at times My brothers' or my house-knave's hunting cry May stir the silence to a moment's life. I am impatient to consort again With men, my equals: once again to speak My thoughts in council, or in public court, Swaying the judgments of attending throngs, And charming minds to unanimity With manly, warm-persuasive argument; Or in the front ranks of embattled hosts To interchange the casts of flying spears 'Mong bloody Mars' high competitors, With poets to record us standing by. Nay, at the fair, the games, the feasting-board, To look on friendly faces and to grasp The trusted hands of other men, were joy Worth even daring the worst, and back again, Taking my 'customed place on Eman Green, Though there he sat, and all his hosts were there."

Meantime, there had arisen among the Ultonian nobles a strong desire to see the exiles restored to their native land. Their retreat was unknown to all save Fergus, the ex-king. Fergus, rising in his place in council, declared aloud that if King Conor gave his royal word that the sons of Usnach should be permitted to return free and unscathed to their inheritance, he himself would go forth to seek them, and ere the then rounding moon had attained the full would lead them back to the royal court of Emania. King Conor arose and answered "Yea!" None dreamed what treachery lurked beneath his word. Fergus at once set sail from the Antrim coast, found the exiles in Glen Etive, and was received by Naisi with joy and exultation, by Deirdre with undefined and shrinking fear. In the end they all accompanied him, and the full round moon shone upon their brief voyage to the coast of Erin; and this was Deirdre's song during the passage:

- "" Harp, take my bosom's burthen on thy string, And, turning it to sad, sweet melody, Waste and disperse it on the careless air.
- " 'Air, take the harp-string's burthen on thy breast, And softly thrilling soulward through the sense, Bring my love's heart again in tune with mine.
- "' Bless'd were the hours when, heart in tune with heart, My love and I desired no happier home Than Etive's airy glades and lonely shore.
- "'Alba, farewell! Farewell, fair Etive bank!
 Sun kiss thee; moon caress thee; dewy stars
 Refresh thee long, dear scenes of quiet days!"

They landed upon the Antrim coast, and they were met by Barach, Lord of Dunseverick, who was a chief among the society of the Red Branch, accompanied by the two sons of Fergus, Illan the Fair, and Buino Borb the Dark. Barach had a high feast of the brethren of the Branch to ward in his castle, and he called upon Fergus, by the secret and imperative pledges of the brotherhood, to tarry for the banquet, while his two sons would take his place as guardians and safe conducts of the sons of Usnach to Emania. Deirdre's keen insight discerns the meditated treachery, which was designed to lure King Fergus to desert his charge. She passionately appeals to him, as king and gentleman, not to forsake them; but Barach holds by his advantage, relying upon the statutes of the Order, the breach of which entailed the gaysh, or ban, involving not merely ignominy but evil destiny. Naisi himself declared that the first duty of Fergus was to his knightly brethren, and that he was fully satisfied with the attendance of his youthful guides. So they ride on. Deirdre, with boding heart, seeks to make acquaintance with and probe the minds of Illan and Buino. She recognises the pure and honourable character of the one, the earthly, covetous and godless nature of the other. She tried a last chance, imploring of her husband to ride on straight to (Dundealga) Dundalk, where they would be safe under the protection of the chivalrous Cuchullin, rather than turn towards Emania and the power of Conor. But in this also she was overruled, for so the Fates had decreed. They turned to the rightward, and reached the city of King Conor. The king did not come forth to meet them (ominous omission), nor did he invite them to his palace or his banquet but coldly sent to assign the Red Branch House as their residence. There Naisi tranquilly sat down to chess with his brother Ardan. The sons of Fergus still remained with them. But Deirdre wrung with doubts and fears, sent her nurse, Levarcam, to penetrate to the hall of Conor and learn what was really designed in their regard. Levarcam found her way to the hall, where, the banquet being ended, she found the king in council with his nobles, mooting a question the very mention of which might well freeze her with horror. The king asked whether since the sons of Usnach had not returned, according to the engagement of King Fergus, before the full of the moon, he was not free from any promise as to their safety?* Upon this the council were divided; the greater number present, among whom was the gallant Prince Cormac, son of Conor, maintaining that the promise held good, and was absolute, not conditional. In the midst of the discussion King Conor spied Levarcam, and, beckoning her to him, inquired eagerly about Deirdre, whether she still retained her ancient beauty. To this Levarcam, with a falsehood dictated by love, answered that her

[•] It is curious that a quibble of precisely the same kind, the fallure to surrender before a particular day, though that failure was due merely to accident and the elements, was made the pretext by King William III. and the Master of Stair for the bloody and perfidious massacre of Chapana.

beauty was gone, and that she was a worn and faded woman. But the king had taken other means of ascertaining the truth. He had sent a spy to climb to the window of the hall of the Red Branch House and bring him tidings as to the aspect of Deirdre. Twice the caitiff clomb to the casement; but when Naisi saw, for the second time, his eyes too curiously fixed upon Deirdre, he flung at him the ponderous chessman which he held in his hand, cutting open the interloper's forehead and felling him to the earth. The wounded spy made his way back to Conor's hall just at the moment when Levarcam was disparaging the charms of Deirdre. "It is a lie," he exclaimed. "I have seen her, and she is more radiant in beauty than ever." Withal he narrated the assault made upon him, and pointed to his streaming blood. These were the words of the eavesdropper:-

"'There lives not beauty on the earth's expanse
Fit to compare with hers. I saw her sit,
A perfect goddess, lovely to behold,
Upon a silken couch: she flung her arms,
No ivory fairer, o'er her golden harp,
And played a merry and delightful air
So sweet, I stood as in an ecstasy;
When that strong traitor who consorts with her,
Spying me, snatched a chessman from the board
And flung it full at me; see here the wound."

Conor started up with the feigned passion which deliberate purpose puts on to gain its ends, and on the spot despatched a pursuivant and guard to seize the

assailant of his messenger. Buino Borb was the first to confront them. He declared himself the guardian of his guests, and, planting a spear in the earth, swore that he would strike dead whoever passed it. Conor's envoy answered softly that he had a word for his private ear, and prevailed on him to come forth and speak with him. The broad domain of Dalwhinny had been often dangled as a temptation by the crafty Conor before the eyes of the greedy Buino. It was now assured to him upon the terms of his deserting the sons of Usnach. Alas for valour and the gifts of intellect if corruption and base desire lie at the root! Illo, the fair-haired boy, at first refused to believe in his brother's treachery, and, when it was too manifest, flung himself, sword in hand, upon the bands of Conor, striking the mercenaries down at every blow, until he met his death at the hands of the king himself, and of the king's son Cormac, who would have given his life for the safety of the sons of Usnach, but who in the bewilderment of the hour deemed it his first duty to stand by his father's side. When Illo was slain, Naisi and his brothers, still undaunted, resolved to shelter Deirdre behind their shield and to cut their way to some place of safety. As for Deirdre, she cherished no illusions. She saw too clearly the end which she had from the first foreboded, and she had prepared a cup for her own drinking. The valorous onset of the three was vain against overwhelming numbers, and their corpses were carried in and laid on the floor of the Red Branch

The state of the s

House. Deirdre, before quaffing the poisoned cup—to her the cup of hope, which would unite her with her husband (remember, reader, that the time was heathen), poured forth over him and over his devoted brothers her fond lament.

The lament is given in the poem before us in stately and sustained blank verse. But there is an earlier version, by Sir Samuel, in rhyme, published in "The Lays of the Western Gael," which, though not so lofty in diction, is yet, we think, more melodious and pathetic, and which we prefer to give to our readers.

- "The lions of the hill are gone,
 And I am left alone—alone—
 Dig the grave both wide and deep,
 For I am sick, and fain would sleep!
- "The falcons of the wood are flown, And I am left alone—alone— Dig the grave both deep and wide, And let us slumber side by side.
- "The dragons of the rock are sleeping, Sleep that wakes not for our weeping! Dig the grave, and make it ready; Lay me on my true love's body.
- "Lay their spears and bucklers bright By the warriors' sides aright; Many a day the three before me On their linked bucklers bore me.

^{*} It was first given in "The Hibernian Nights' Entertainment."

- "Lay upon the low grave floor,
 'Neath each head, the blue claymore;
 Many a time the noble three
 Redden'd these blue blades for me.
- "Lay the collars, as is meet,
 Of their greyhounds at their feet;
 Many a time for me have they
 Brought the tall red deer to bay.
- "In the falcon's jesses throw,
 Hook and arrow, line and bow;
 Never again by stream or plain
 Shall the gentle woodsmen go.
- "Sweet companions ye were ever, Harsh to me, your sister, never; Woods and wilds and misty valleys Were, with you, as good's a palace.
- "Oh! to hear my true love singing, Sweet as sound of trumpets ringing: Like the sway of ocean swelling Roll'd his deep voice round our dwelling.
- "Oh! to hear the echoes pealing Round our dear and fairy sheeling, When the three, with soaring chorus, Pass'd the silent skylark o'er us.
- "Echo now, sleep, morn and even— Lark alone enchant the heaven! Ardan's lips are scant of breath, Naisi's tongue is cold in death.
- "Stag, exult on glen and mountain—Salmon, leap from loch to fountain—Heron, in the free air warm ye—Usnach's sons no more will harm ye!

"Erin's stay no more you are, Rulers of the ridge of war; Never more 'twill be your fate To keep the beam of battle straight!

Woe is me! by fraud and wrong, Traitors false and tyrants strong, Fell clan Usnach, bought and sold, For Barach's feast and Conor's gold!

- "Woe to Eman, roof and wall!—
 Woe to Red Branch, hearth and hall—
 Tenfold woe and black dishonour
 To the foul and false Clan Conor!
- "Dig the grave both wide and deep, Sick I am, and fain would sleep! Dig the grave and make it ready, Lay me on my true love's body!"

Her lamentation over, she drank of the cup and escaped from Conor and his wiles. Fergus MacRoy arrived from Dunseverick only in time to see the ruin that had been wrought, wrought in great part by his own softness and credulity. He cried out in anguish against the perjured king, to whom he had yielded up his own throne, renounced him, and defied him, and at last betook himself to the court of Conor's divorced spouse, Maev, Queen of Connaught, whose chief captain he became in the great war about to ensue, the theme of the *Tain-Bo-Cuailgne*.

The "Tain" itself, as we have said, is not sung by Sir Samuel Ferguson, but he has told us the story of the mystic and preternatural recovery of the lost legend.

The "Tain" was supposed to be the composition of King Fergus himself, who, like Taillefer and many of the minstrels of the Middle Ages, was poet as well as warrior. But in the course of ages the "Tain" was lost, and it was believed that the only remaining copy, traced on vellum, had been cut in pieces and the fragments carried to Rome in the days of St. Patrick. But among the Bards of Erin the sacred law and usage of their profession prescribed that when called on in the hall of prince or chief for any of the famous lays of the Gael he should be prepared to chant it. So in the time of Guary, King of Connaught, in the sixth century of our era, the king, in his hall at Gort, called on the chief bard, Sanchan Torpest, to chant for them the matchless Tain-Bo-Cuailgne. The king made this demand of set purpose, for he knew that the knowledge of the "Tain" was lost, and he was weary bestowing lavish gifts upon the too-exacting College of the Bards. Sanchan was stung to the heart with shame and ire. that in the hall of the king the chief bard was called on for a "Tain" he could not chant. He rose, exclaiming that it was well known the lay was lost; that in full assembly of the ollaves of Erin they failed to find any certain knowledge of it amongst them all; that he himself, dissatisfied with this decree, had roamed in search of the "Tain" through all the fields and castles of Erin-and not through Erin alone, but Alba's hills

and straths, to the very recesses of Glen Etive, where Fergus had found the sons of Usnach, and Naisi had shouted welcome to him.

- ""Wondrous shout, from whence repeated, even as up the answering hills
 - Echo's widening wave proceeded, spreads the sound of song
 - All the echoing waste of ages, tale and lay and choral strain.
 - But the chief delight of sages and of kings was still the "Tain."
- ""Made when mighty Maev invaded Cuailgnia for her brown bright bull;
 - Fergus was the man that made it, for he saw the war in full,
 - And in Maev's own chariot mounted, sang what pass'd before his eyes,
 - As you'd hear it now recounted, knew I but where Fergus lies.
- "' Bear me witness, Giant Bouchaill, herdsmen of the mountain drove.
 - How with spell and spirit-struggle many a midnight hour I strove
 - Back to life to call the author! for before I'd hear it said,
 - "Neither Sanchan knew it," rather would I learn it from the dead;
- "Ay, and pay the dead their teaching with the one price spirits crave,
 - When the hand of magic, reaching past the barriers of the grave,
 - Drags the struggling phantom lifeward:—but the Ogham on his stone
 - Still must mock us undecipher'd; grave and lay alike unknown.

"'So that put to shame the direst, here I stand and own, O King,

Thou a lawful lay requirest Sanchan Torpest cannot sing.

Take again the gawds you gave me—cup nor crown no more will I:

Son, from further insult save me: lead me hence, and let me die." •

- Murgen, the younger son of Sanchan, seeing his father's anguish, vowed that he would make his way to Tours (seat of St. Martin, kinsman of Patrick), or even to Rome itself, to the "Coarb of the Keys," wherever hope could deem that tidings of the lay might be found. His brother, Eimena, insisted upon accompanying him, and they set forth together from the west; but it was decreed that the "Tain" should be recovered before they left their native soil. As they were traversing Ireland from west to east, Murgen grew faint on the shore of Loch Ein, near a standing headstone, and his brother left him in search of needful In his absence Murgen began to spell the Ogfood. ham inscription on the stone, and, to his amazement, found it was the very burying-place of Fergus, son of Roy. Murgen, ignorant of spell or incantation, yet thought that if adjured in some potent name the spirit of Fergus might appear to him and give him what he yearned for. He invoked him by every adjuration which he could fancy would have power over such a spirit. He appealed to him in the name of his dear son Illo, who fell at the hand of Conor Mac Nessa. At last he invoked him in the name of sacred song:

"'Still he stirs not. Love of woman, thou regard'st not Fergus now:

Love of children, instincts human, care for these no more hast thou:

Wider comprehensions, deeper insights to the dead belong: Since for Love thou wakest not, sleeper, yet awake for sake of Song!

". Thou, the first in rhythmic cadence dressing life's discordant tale,

Wars of chiefs and loves of maidens gavest the poem to the Gael:

Now they've lost their noblest measure, and in dark days hard at hand,

Song shall be the only treasure left them in their native

"'Not for selfish gawds or baubles dares my soul disturb the graves:

Love consoles, but Song ennobles; song less men are meet for slaves:

Fergus, for the Gael's sake, waken !—never let the scornful Gauls

'Mongst our land's reproaches reckon lack of song within our walls!'

"Fergus rose. A mist ascended with him, and a flash was seen

As of brazen sandals blended with a mantle's wafture green; But so thick the cloud closed o'er him, Eimena, return'd at last,

Found not on the field before him but a mist-heap gray and vast."

That night within the encompassing mist, the spirit of Fergus Mac Roy thrice repeated to Murgen the words of the great lay, and they remained deeply graven on his memory. They hurried back to Sanchan, that he in his turn might learn the words of the "Tain" from the lips of his devoted son. That accomplished, once more they sought King Guary and the royal halls of Gort. Again the king called on Sanchan for the "Tain."

- "'Yea, with voice and string I'll chant it.' Murgen to hi father's knee
 - Set the harp: no prelude wanted, Sanchan struck the master key,
 - And, as bursts the brimful river all at once from caves of Cong.
 - Forth at once, and once for ever, leap'd the torrent of the song.
- "Floating on a brimful torrent, men go down and banks go by:
 - Caught adown the lyric current, Guary, captured, ear and eye,
 - Heard no more the courtier's jeering, saw no more the walls of Gort.
- Creeve Roe's meads instead appearing, and Emania's royal fort.
- "Vision chasing splendid vision, Sanchan rol d the rhythmic scene;
 - They that mock'd in lewd derision now, at gaze, with wondering mien,
- Sate, and, as the glorying master sway'd the tightening reins of song,
- Felt emotion's pulses faster—fancies faster bound along.

When the magnificent strain had ended there remained the fated price to be paid for the appeal to the

world of spirits. The ghostly shape of King Fergus passed in mist and icy silence through the hall, and when the spectre had departed, young Murgen sate upon his chair, a form of lifeless clay. Such price was paid for the recovery of the "Tain."*

Another exceedingly remarkable poem of the heathen era is "Conary." Conary was Arch-King of Erin in . days not long after those of Maev and Conor Mac Nessa. Conall Carnach, the foremost of the Ulidian champions next after the mighty Cuchullin, was still living. Conary, the valiant und magnanimous, was compelled to banish his three foster-brothers, Ferger, Fergel, and Fergobar, for treason, and his own two brothers in blood, Ferragon and Lomna Druth, accompanied their exile. Strange to say, considering the more than brotherly tie of fosterage, Fergobar was far the bitterest in hate against him. All five joined the British pirate, Ingcel, in his invasion of Erin. They had taken a great spoil in Britain from the kinsmen of Ingcel, and they had promised him in return a corresponding spoil upon the Irish coast. After their landing they advanced close to the spot where Conary, on his return from Thomond to his palace of Tara, was resting for the night in one of the great hostelries or caravansaries of the time. This hospitable place of reception was

[•] We cannot part from the "Tain-Bo-Cuailgne" without mention of Mr. Aubrey de Vere's very beautiful poems of "The Sons of Usnach" and "The Foray of Queen Maev," which together embrace the whole legend from the birth of Deirdre to the death of Cuchullin. Mr. Joyce has also attuned his lyre, with great skill, to the same theme.

at Bohernabreena, near the source of the Dodder, among the heights that surround Eblana. There the king rested with his nobles and warriors and minstrels. Amongst the latter were little men in red caps and mantles, men of the Sidh, or fairy race, whose evil-tuned minstrelsy that night was fatal to the king. brings out in much more prominent relief than the "Deirdre" the superstition of the gaysh. The gaysh was something prohibited, as being of evil omen-something that was not to be done either at all or at certain times and places, or under certain circumstances. The penalty was some calamitous visitation from the unseen powers. Some such superstition would appear to be of almost universal prevalence, but in those days it was extended and ramified until it was hard to know what action might not come under the evil ban. Conary, broad and joyous of nature, made light of these things, and had that day committed many violations of the gaysh. Ingcel sent out his spies, and they reported to him all that they had seen of the king and his attendants. As the spies described each, Ingcel asked of Ferragon concerning them, and Ferragon made answer truly. These descriptions are, we conceive, the most finished and complete endeavour to represent in modern language the life and manners that existed in Ireland 2,000 years ago. As the spy narrated the looks, the costumes, and the arms of the mighty men who surrounded Conary, the hearts of the king's brothers melted within them, and they appealed to the fear of Ingcel, telling him how helpless was the strife against such adversaries. But Ingcel was steel and flint, exulting, as he heard each detail, in the thought of the glory he would win and the spoils he would carry off. When Ferragon and Lomna Druth found all their remonstrances unavailing, they slew themselves rather than draw fratricidal swords against King Conary. Ingcel spurned their bodies with contempt, and sounded the onset. In the battle that ensued the invaders would have been annihilated but for the malice of the fairy minstrels, who, by their deluding music, led Conall Carnach and his men far away from the foes and permitted the pirate to regain his ships. Conary himself, sorely wounded, was carried back to the hostelry, and died of thirst while his little son went in search of a draught of water for him, but brought it too late. From this fine poem we can make but few extracts. Here is the description of Conall Carnach:-

""A single warrior on a separate bench
I saw. Methinks no man was ever born
So stately built, so perfect of his limbs,
So hero-like is he. Fair-haired he is
And yellow-bearded, with an eye of blue.
He sits apart and wears a wistful look,
As if he missed some friend's companionship.'
Then Ferragon, not waiting question, cried:
'Gods! all the foremost, all the valiantest
Of Erin's champions, gathered in one place
For our destruction, are assembled here!
That man is Conall Carnach,; and the friend
He looks for vainly with a wistful eye

Is great Cuchullin: he no more shall share
The upper bench with Conall; since the tomb
Holds him by hand of Conall well avenged.
The foremost this, the mightiest champion this
Left of the Red Branch, since Cuchullin's fall.
Look you, as thick as fragments are of ice
When one night's frost is crackled underfoot,
As thick as autumn leaves, as blades of grass,
Shall the lopp'd members and the cloven half-heads
Of them that hear me, be, by break of day,
Before Da-Derga's doors, if this assault
Be given while Conall Carnach waits within!'"

We add but the remonstrance, beautifully conceived and phrased, of the king's brothers, Ferragon and Lomna, against the meditated destruction of the king and his nobles, and with them of all that was of worth in the realm:—

"' Pity to slay this king,' said Lomna Druth: 'Since he has reigned there has not fallen a year Of dearth, or plague, or murrain on the land; The dew has never left the blade of grass One day of Conary's time, before the noon; Nor harsh wind ruffled hair upon the side Of grazing beast. Since he began his reign From mid-spring to mid-autumn cloud nor storm Has dimm'd the daily-shining, bounteous sun: But each good year has sent its harvests three, Of blade, of ear, of fruit, apple, and nut. Peace until now in all his realm has reigned, And terror of just laws kept men secure. What though, by love constrained, in passion's hour, I joined my fortunes to the desperate fates Of hapless kinsmen, I repent it now, And wish that rigorous law had had its course Sooner than this good king should now be slain."

And in answer to Ingcel's stern rejoinder that for the spoil which, with his help, they had taken in Britain they had sworn to permit him to take a spoil in Ireland, Lomna replied:—

"' We gave thee licence,' Lomna said, 'and I Grieve that we gave it, yea, or took the like, To take a plunder; but we gave thee not Licence to take the life, the soul itself, Of our whole nation, as you now would do. For, slay our reverend sages of the law, Slay him who puts the law they teach in act; Slay our sweet poets, and our sacred bards, Who keep the continuity of time By fame perpetual of renowned deeds: Slay our experienced captains who prepare The youth for martial manhood, and the charge Of public freedom, as befits a state Self-governed, self-sufficing, self-contained: Slay all that minister our loftier life, Now by this evil chance assembled here, You leave us but the carcass of a state, A rabble ripe to rot, and yield the land To foreign masters and perpetual shame."

So far these are the legends of Ireland in the days of the pagans and druids, and we ask our readers to consider them in connexion with Hume's statement that, from the earliest dawn of time down to the English invasion, Ireland had been sunk in the deepest barbarism and savagery. Barbarism it may, indeed, in one sense be called, but it is such barbarism as Homer has painted. Here were men who in wild acts

and wild reprisals resembled the men of what are termed the heroic ages in all lands, but who were acquainted with architecture, ship-building, weaving of cloth and linen, working in metals, the rule and councils of princes, the just administration of law, and all the features and germs of a primitive but real civilisation.

There are other poems of the heathen period, especially "Mesgedra" and "The Naming of Cuchullin," which we would fain dwell upon if space permitted, but to which we can only refer our readers.

On the myths of the Ossianic cycle Sir Samuel Ferguson has dwelt but little; and, sooth to say, though an additional interest is given to these later legends by the introduction of the Christian idea, and the part which in them St. Patrick fills, yet in greatness of conception and true human interest they, in our judgment, fall short of the earlier lays of Cuchullin, and King Fergus, and Deirdre. But there is one composition of great melody and beauty, the poem on the grave of Queen Aideen, daughter of Angus of Ben-Edar, who died of grief for the loss of her husband, Oscar, son of Ossian, slain at the battle of Gavra in the year 284 of our era. She was buried at what is now termed the Cromlech, in Lord Howth's demesne. Her funeral song was sung by Ossian. This poem, we may mention, has been beautifully illustrated by Miss Stokes. We have only space to extract the earlier stanzas.

- "They heaved the stone; they heap'd the cairn:
 Said Ossian, 'In a queenly grave
 We leave her, 'mong her fields of fern,
 Between the cliff and wave.
- "The cliff behind stands clear and bare,
 And bare, above, the heathery steep
 Scales the clear heaven's expanse, to where
 The Danaan Druids sleep.
- "' 'And all the sands that, left and right,
 The grassy isthmus-ridge confine,
 In yellow bars lie bare and bright
 Among the sparkling brine.
- "' 'A clear pure air pervades the scene,
 In loneliness and awe secure;
 Meet spot to sepulchre a queen
 Who in her life was pure.
- " 'Here, far from camp and chase removed, Apart in Nature's quiet room, The music that alive she loved Shall cheer her in the tomb.
- "The humming of the noontide bees, The lark's loud carol all day long, And, borne on evening's salted breeze, The clanking sea-bird's song,
- "' Shall round her airy chamber float,
 And with the whispering winds and streams
 Attune to Nature's tenderest note
 The tenor of her dreams.

- "' 'And oft, at tranquil eve's decline
 When full tides lip the old Green Plain
 The lowing of Moynalty's kine
 Shall round her breathe again,
- "' In sweet remembrance of the days
 When, duteous, in the lowly vale,
 Unconscious of my Oscar's gaze,
 She filled the fragrant pail.'"

Of the noble epic of Congal, whose period is the sixth century, and which depicts the last struggle of reviving heathenism with the Christian idea, we have spoken in a former article. Coming down to the Middle Ages and the time subsequent to the English invasion, we have the graphic and striking ballad of the Welshmen of Tirawley, narrating the deadly feud between the two clans of the Barretts and the Lynotts, both Welsh by origin, who came over in the wake of Strongbow, and who were among the feudatories of Mac William Bourke. From this singular tale of vengeance and retribution we can only extract the stanzas which relate how the blinded Emon Lynott nursed and trained his son, Emon Oge, amid the solitudes of Ben Nephin that he might become the instrument of his revenge upon the Barretts.

"And ere the bright-orb'd year its course had run,
On his brown round-knotted knee he nurs'd a son,
A child of light, with eyes
As clear as are the skies
In summer, when sunrise
Has began;
So the Lynott
Nursed his vengeance on the Barretts of Tirawley.

"And, as ever the bright boy grew in strength and size.

Made him perfect in each manly exercise,
The salmon in the flood,
The dun deer in the wood,
The eagle in the cloud
To surprise,

On Ben Nephin, Far above the foggy fields of Tirawley.

"With the yellow-knotted spear-shaft, with the bow, With the steel, prompt to deal shot and blow, He taught him from year to year And train'd him without a peer, For a perfect cavalier,

Hoping so—
Far his forethought—
For vengeance on the Barretts of Tirawley.

"And, when mounted on his proud-bounding steed,
Emon Oge sat a cavalier indeed;
Like the ear upon the wheat
When winds in Autumn beat
On the bending stems, his seat;
And the speed

And the speed Of his courser

Was the wind from Barna-na-gee o'er Tirawley!"

Sir Samuel's versions from the Irish would of themselves deserve a separate comment. They represent but too faithfully the sorrow and disaster, the lamentation and woes of the days of defeat and spoliation. What can be more melancholy, but at the same time more musical, than "The Downfall of the Gael," of which the Irish original was written by O'Gnive, bard of the O'Neills, in the days of Queen Elizabeth.

"My heart is in woe,
And my soul deep in trouble—
For the mighty are low,
And abased are the noble.

"The sons of the Gael
Are in exile and mourning,
Worn, weary, and pale,
As spent exiles returning;

"Or men who, in flight From the field of disaster. Beseech the black night On their flight to fall faster;

"Or seamen aghast
When their planks gape asunder,
And the waves fierce and fast
Tumble through in hoarse thunder;

"Or men whom we see
That have got their death-omen—
Such wretches are we
In the chains of our foemen!"

Coming down two hundred years later, to the days of the Penal Laws, we have the lament over the ruins of the Abbey of Timoleague:—

"As I stood before the portals,
Where of old were wont to be,
For the blind, the halt, and leper,
Alms and hospitality.

"Still the ancient seat was standing, Built against the buttress gray, Where the clergy used to welcome Weary travellers on their way.

- "Was a time when bells were tinkling, Clergy preaching peace abroad, Psalms a-singing, music ringing Praises to the mighty God.
- "Empty aisle, deserted chancel, Tower tottering to your fall, Many a storm since then has beaten On the gray head of your wall!
- "Many a bitter storm and tempest
 Has your roof-tree turned away,
 Since you first were form'd a temple
 To the Lord of night and day.
- "Holy house of ivied gables,

 That wert once the country's pride,
 Houseless now in weary wandering
 Roam your inmates far and wide.
- "Where the lark to early matins
 Used your clergy forth to call,
 There, alas! no tongue is stirring,
 Save the daw's upon the wall.
- "Refectory cold and empty,
 Dormitory bleak and bare,
 Where are now your pious uses,
 Simple bed and frugal fare?
- "Gone your abbot, rule and order, Broken down your altar stones; Nought see I beneath your shelter, Save a heap of clayey bones.

"Oh! the hardship, oh! the hatred, Tyranny and cruel war, Persecution and oppression That have left you as you are!"

We cannot fitlier close this essay than with the lament for Thomas Davis. How truly patriotic it is, how musical in its sorrow, how Irish to the heart's core in feeling, illustration, flow, and diction!

"I walked through Ballinderry in the Spring-time,
When the bud was on the tree;
And I said, in every fresh-ploughed field beholding
The sowers striding free,
Scattering broadcast forth the corn in golden plenty
On the quick seed-clasping soil,
Even such, this day, among the fresh-stirred hearts of Erin,
Thomas Davis is thy toil!

"I sat by Ballyshannon in the summer,
And saw the salmon leap;
And I said, as I beheld the gallant creatures
Spring glittering from the deep,
Through the spray, and through the prone heaps striving
onward
To the calm clear streams above,
So seekest thou thy native founts of freedom, Thomas
Davis,
In thy brightness of strength and love!

"I stood on Derrybawn in the autumn,
And I heard the eagle call,
With a clangorous cry of wrath and lamentation
That filled the wide mountain hall.

O'er the bare deserted place of his plundered eyrie; And I said, as he screamed and soared, So callest thou, then wrathful-soaring Thomas Davis, For a nation's rights restored!

"And, alas! to think but now, and thou art lying,
Dear Davis, dead at thy mother's knee;
And I, no mother near, on my own sick-bed,
That face on earth shall never see:
I may lie and try to feel that I am not dreaming,
I may lie and try to say "Thy will be done"—
But a hundred such as I will never comfort Erin
For the loss of the noble son!

"Young husbandman of Erin's fruitful seed-time,
In the fresh track of danger's plough!
Who will walk the heavy, toilsome, perilous furrow
Girt with freedom's seed-sheets now?
Who will banish with the wholesome crop of knowledge
The flaunting weed and the bitter thorn,
Now that thou thyself art but a seed for hopeful planting
Against the resurrection morn?

'Young salmon of the flood-tide of freedom
That swells round Erin's shore!
Thou wilt leap against their loud oppressive torrent
Of bigotry and hate no more:
Drawn downward by their prone material instinct,
Let them thunder on their rocks and foam—
Thou hast leaped, aspiring soul to founts beyond their
raging,
Where troubled waters never come!

"But I grieve not, eagle of the empty eyrie,
That thy wrathful cry is still:
And that the songs alone of peaceful mourners
Are heard to-day on Erin's hill;
Better far, if brothers' war be destined for us
(God avert that horrid day, I pray!)
That ere our hands be stained with slaughter fratricidal
Thy warm heart should be cold in clay.

"But my trust is strong in God, who made us brothers,
That he will not suffer those right hands
Which thou hast joined in holier rights than wedlock,
To draw opposing brands.
Oh, many a tuneful tongue that thou mad'st vocal
Would lie cold and silent then;
And songless long once more, should often-widowed Erin
Mourn the loss of her brave young men.

"O brave young men, my love, my pride, my promise,
"Tis on you my hopes are set,
In manliness, in kindliness, in justice,
To make Erin a nation yet:
Self-respecting, self-relying, self-advancing,
In union or in severance, free and strong—
And if God grant this, then, under God, to Thomas Davis
Let the greater praise belong."

Thus traversing all the ages, from the shadowy gigantic forms and mystic lays of the earliest epoch down to our own times, from Cuchullin and Fergus Mac Roy to Thomas Davis, may we not say that Sir Samuel Ferguson has achieved a great work for his country? Be it no disparagement to other labourers in the same field, whom we honour and admire, to say

that he is in the front of them all. It has been urged upon us that it is almost a pity that we did not devote ourselves to make his great gifts as a poet better known through the pages of some English periodical.* We do not adopt this view. In the present condition of English taste our words would be addressed to cold. reluctant, and unsympathetic ears. Here and there a man of genius, like Matthew Arnold, may appreciate the treasures that lie in Celtic poetry and legend, but to the ordinary English mind they are extraneous and repulsive. However that may be, the first thing is to make our poet more known and more prized by his. own countrymen. If a distinctive national Irish literature in the English tongue is, as we hope and believe. an achievement of which the foundations have been already laid, and which one day, in fair and stately proportions, will body forth all that is best and noblest in the character and aspirations of the Gael, and not of the Gael alone, but of the Gael as interfused and blended with the Dane, the Saxon, and the Norman, according to the noble language of Davis himself, then to Sir Samuel Ferguson may the greater praise belong. this the pillar of his fame.

These essays appeared in The Irish Monthly, May and August, 1884.

The poetry of Sir Samuel Fergu Stanford University Libraries



3 6105 034 406 715

DATE DUE		
		11
	-	
+		_
		-//-
-		
-	-	-

